

STILL STRIKING TERROR!

AMJAD KHAN

UNFORGETTABLE



Amjad Khan continues to live on in the public memory as Gabbar Singh of *Sholay*. His brutish bearing on screen actually concealed a softhearted interior. In an intimate interview with CINÉ BLITZ, Amjad's son Shadaab divulges the truth...

Life was never quite easy for Amjad Khan right from his childhood days. As Shadaab puts it, "Imtiaz Khan, dad's elder brother was the family favourite and dad was considered the black sheep. Dad was the aggressive sort... He would get into brawls in school and had to be shifted from St. Andrews to Wadia because he beat up a priest in

Std. XI! The hostilities continued in college and he moved from National College to Bhawan's. He was always restless. Stability came once he met my mom in the final year of his BA (she was in std. X) and decided to marry her.

"The neighbours would complain about dad too," Shadaab continues, "But people have wrong notions about stars. They think we lead wild lifestyles and have late night parties with music blaring till 3 p.m. If a girl were to tell her father that she wanted to marry an actor, he would throw a fit because he was sure the guy would cheat on his daughter every second day!"

Shadaab informs us that Amjad was a double MA and was studying with the Times of India Group to be a journalist, "but he had to give up his studies to support his family. My grandfather was suffering from cancer and dad needed Rs. 500 a day for his treatment. Dad took up acting and started doing theatre... But his father passed away before *Sholay* released and dad felt a vacuum in his life. The person for whom he had earned the money and the fame wasn't around to enjoy his success. This remained dad's biggest regret and he would often bring it up in his conversation."

Amjad Khan's foray into films had its share of trials... "Dad had to face humiliation when he entered the industry," recalls Shadaab. "A prominent producer whom I wouldn't like to name would call dad everyday on the sets and make him sit decked up in the continuity room for hours without offering him a glass of water. After a week he replaced dad. Once *Sholay* was declared a hit, the same producer changed his attitude and offered dad Rs. 7 lakh to do his film. Dad invited him home for lunch but refused to do his film. He didn't work with filmmakers who didn't respect him, no matter how big they were!"

Amjad Khan did around 300 films in the course of his career. "*Sholay*,

Mukadar Ka Sikandar and *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* ranked highly for dad and for me. Three of his films released before *Sholay* went unnoticed and he continued with theatre." Ramesh Sippy had apparently seen Amjad on stage and signed him on for *Sholay*. The film won him thunderous acclaim but ironically, not the popular award!

"Dad was nominated for the popular award for *Sholay* but it went to someone else. Mom was appalled

Imagine someone of the stature of Ray saab telling dad that there would be no film without him! Such instances made dad happy and he would narrate them to me with a deep sense of pride. Amitji would visit dad in the hospital and joke with him. I am grateful to the people who helped dad get back on his feet but I wonder how many of them did it for Amjad Khan the man or for the recognition that *Sholay* had got him. Unfortunately a person's position and persona matters more...



Amjad shares a warm moment with his family...

but dad thought that probably he wasn't a big enough star to win the award. He believed in rewards and not awards. He was more concerned about what the public and his colleagues thought of him as an actor. If the jury didn't give him the award for *Sholay* it was a slap on their face. They made a fool of themselves. If you don't give the popular award to the most popular actor you are a goddamn idiot! What more can I say? It was their loss and not dad's.

"But *Sholay* was a well-made film," maintains Shadaab. "The industry commemorated 25 years of *Sholay*... I am glad that the film has reaped its reward. Credit for the film's success should go to Rameshji and the entire unit of the film. Rameshji was an actor's director. He handled dad well... He treated him patiently, gave him freedom and let the actor in him emerge."

Amjad Khan's big release was soon followed by a narrow escape in a car crash...

"Dad's car collided with a tree while en route to Goa to shoot for *The Great Gambler*... His condition was so critical that he couldn't speak and was bed ridden. I was two years old and I had dislocated my shoulder and fractured my collar bone. My mom who was pregnant with my sister too was injured in the mishap.

My maternal side of the family and dad's mom were very supportive... I wasn't traumatised or insecure because we had a huge family and elders to look after us. It didn't occur to me that my dad was fighting for his life in the hospital. The industry was helpful too. People wanted to be around dad and wanted him to live. They would send him flowers... Mr. Satyajit Ray told dad that he had to recover soon to play the character of Wajid Ali Shah in his film *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*, or he would be forced to shelve the film...

Yet I feel that there was a lot more camaraderie and brotherhood amongst the actors in those days because they weren't insecure," points Shadaab. "Today actors prefer to spend time in their make-up rooms and emerge as two prize boxers when the bell sounds. They call it professionalism but I don't agree with them. I believe in what dad taught me - that you should work like a family. Dad got along with everyone on the sets and commanded respect. He would say that the world doesn't have a problem with you, you have a problem with the world. If you don't have a problem with anyone no one will have a problem with you.

"Dad was a softhearted person and put on a façade," reveals Shadaab. "People didn't like him for his brashness. But he wasn't rude. He would call a spade a spade. That was his biggest flaw and his honesty went against him at times. You can't avoid mistakes. They are waiting to be made. But it doesn't pay to be honest! You should be diplomatic but that's easier said than done. The only lesson that I have learnt from dad is that success and failure don't matter in the long run. If you achieve success, great! But if you don't, don't carp! Move ahead with your life."

It hurt Shadaab to watch people vilify his father... "The same people who spoke ill about dad behind his back were so sweet to him to his face ...such hypocrites! Many industry bigwigs were waiting for dad to fall. And when he did, they isolated him. The late Manmohan Desai, Yashji and Prakash Mehra stayed

The duo gave hits like *Sholay*!





Old time buddies...

with dad through thick and thin. Prakashji produced *Mukaddar Ka Sikandar* and distributed *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* in Bombay. Though the film didn't do well, dad was happy to have had an opportunity to work with Satyajit Ray."

Amitabh Bachchan and Vinod Khanna were also close to Amjad Khan. "Amitji and dad would call each other's shots. Dad would travel everyday from Bombay to meet Vinod Khanna at the Rajneesh

Ashram, Poona to find him watering plants most of the time... It wasn't a pleasant sight for dad! Other than them, most of dad's friends were from college. He liked to hang around with them and didn't circulate much in the industry. He went to parties just to show his face.

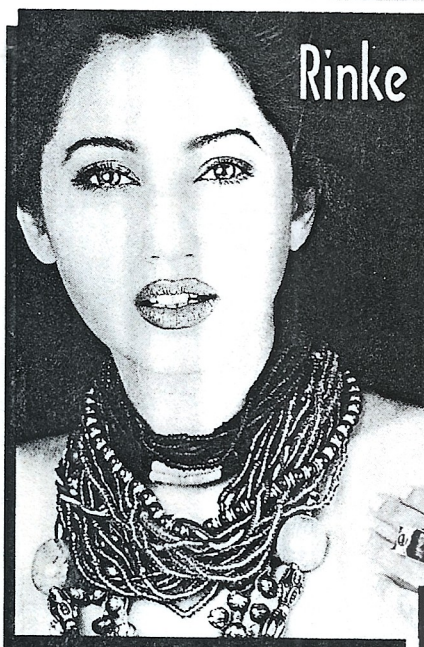
"He was a great father – no two ways about it! Dad was my best friend and I trusted him. He didn't boss around. He treated Vinay uncle more like a family member than a secretary. He never raised his voice or hand on us and spent his free time with us. Mom was the disciplinarian and the controlling influence in our lives. She instilled our values in us."

Shadaab informs that the atmosphere at home was congenial and influenced his choice of profession. "Instead of playing Ludo and Snakes and Ladders, we would mimic and act. Though dad would

say that after completing our education we could pick a profession of our choice, in his heart he wanted one of us (at least me) to be an actor.

"I respected his wish. I don't know if I'll make it big in the industry but I am here to keep my father's name alive. I don't want people to forget him. Then there's my ego – I'd rather be known as Shadaab the actor than remain anonymous!"

★ Manisha Almadi



PIC: SUBI SAMUEL

Rinke

DUMPED For Manisha!

It must definitely be heartbreaking for Rinke, who had pinned her hopes on this film. After all, she knew that a film with Ram Gopal Varma, if not a smashing success, would definitely be talked about. He is undoubtedly one of the finest directors we have today, and there are many who would give their right arm to work in the film... Rinke having bagged the role was no mean

achievement.

But as they say, there is many a slip between the cup and the lip. This sad truth dawned on Rinke one not so fine morning, when she was informed that she was no more a part of *Company*!

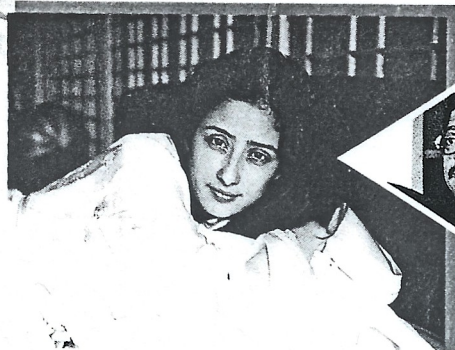
On further digging, we got at the truth behind this act... Apparently, Rinke was supposed to play a 25 year-old bar dancer, who's married to a much older gangster, played by Ajay Devgan. After just three days of shooting, writer Jaideep Saini (he has written Ramu's *Jungle* earlier) realised that this track wasn't really fitting in with the story. He decided to change the entire script. Eventually, Rinke's character turned into a 30-plus, educated, single woman, who's in love with the gangster. Naturally Ramu realised that Rinke by no chance fit into the role of an older woman. That's when

he decided to replace her with Manisha, who would suit the newly changed character better.

Rinke was duly informed of the replacement and according to unit members she took it rather gracefully. As one unit member puts it, "Ramuji was really happy with Rinke's acting abilities, but that didn't help matters much since she

wouldn't suit the role!"

Guess Rinke has some more patient waiting to do!



Rinke Khanna, darling daughter of Dimple and Rajesh Khanna, is going through a tough phase in her career... At a time when offers are not very forthcoming, her brightest hope was her role in Ram Gopal Varma's prestigious film, *Company*. Sadly, we hear that just after the shooting of one schedule, Ram Gopal Varma has decided to replace her with Manisha Koirala!